

by Steven Libowitz

Clarinetist Coaxes Composer to Update Concerto

Clarinetist Fátima Boix Cantó was just surfing online, searching for a new piece to play when she found a gem among the wasteland of cat capers, how-to videos, and talking-head ego trips that make up a big bulk of YouTube. "I was looking for pieces for a soloist on the piccolo clarinet, because it's my soul instrument," explained the Spanish-born young musician who is a first-time fellow at MAW this summer. "I discovered years ago that it does something to me. I have some connection where I can express myself which I can't explain. But it just feels like home. It has a very extroverted feel to it, and I'm pretty extroverted and very loud myself, so maybe that's why, because it stands out."

Cantó said she had previously commissioned a few piccolo pieces for masterclasses, but she wanted "some-



Clarinetist Fátima Boix Cantó's sounds fill the Santa Barbara air

thing that was already composed."

Turns out she found only one on YouTube: a piccolo clarinet concerto by American William Neil written in 1988. But that was all she needed.

"I fell in love right away," she said. "It's very colorful and very well-structured. It feels like it's calling me from beginning to end. It very mystical, in several parts. And it's also a little wild, with lots of cadenzas. Those characteristics I like very much."

Having been accepted to study at Miraflores, Cantó considered she could play the piece for the Concerto Competition, in which nearly all of the instrumental soloists vie for a coveted slot performing with the full Fellow orchestra in concert at the Granada.

There was only one problem: Neil's piccolo clarinet piece was written for a small chamber ensemble – just six players – but works entered in the competition need to be ready for the full Academy Festival Orchestra (AFO) to perform on Concerto Night. What's more, there wasn't even a piano reduction – a sheet music arrangement of a score that condenses the orchestral (or in this case, non-soloist) parts into something playable on the piano – which was necessary for the competitive rounds. With the first face-off looming, Cantó was worried.

"I was almost about to give up," she recalled. "I figured I'd just play the Copland or one of the other pieces I already knew. But I was disappointed, because I love the piece so much."

Instead, she decided to contact the composer, a self-publisher who had already had his interest piqued when the original request for the sheet music came from the music library in Finland where Cantó was studying.

Neil said he'd do the piano reduction right away, and Cantó received it within three days, already an astonishing accommodation. "I was very happy, but I didn't even think of asking him to make a new version for a full orchestra. But in the last moment, the composer asked me, 'What if I did?' Everything just started to flow from there."

Cantó also asked Neil to tell her the story of the piece, because she needed to talk about it in a master class and learned that the inspiration was French high-wire artist Phillipe Petit. That added more color to her understanding of the work, she said.

"For me, he's an artist who is so small, but he creates something so dangerous and big by what he does, even though he is a little man. The piece reflects that a little bit. It's small but daring."

Armed with the info, propelled by playing a work unfamiliar to the

judges and brimming with confidence, Cantó breezed through the early rounds. At the finals, she knew she nailed the piece as soon as she finished.

"It's gotten better every time I played it, of course, because it's very new to me. But I think I did my best performance. Every time I play it, I am able to make it more my own. Even though I was nervous during the finals, I felt like I was able to put my ideas forward. I was very much inside of the music. And I enjoyed it even if I didn't win."

This Saturday, Cantó will play Neil's concert backed by the full Academy Festival Orchestra at the Granada, where she'll be joined by her fellow competition-winning colleagues violinist Isaac Allen, who will play a movement from Sibelius' Concerto in D Minor, Op. 47, and pianist Dominic Cheli, who performs a portion of Prokofiev's Concerto No. 2 in G Minor, Op. 16. Following intermission, conductor-composer Matthew Aucoin will also debut his Suite from *Crossing*, his opera about Walt Whitman.

For Cantó, performing the concerto is just one of many highlights in her summer in Santa Barbara. She also served as first clarinetist for last Saturday's AFO concert that featured Rachmaninoff's Symphony No. 2, playing the "tough but rewarding" solo she called "every clarinetist's dream." With the Neil in the rear-view mirror, she'll start honing chamber pieces for upcoming performances at Picnic Concerts or the Community Concerts at the Faulkner Gallery. Although no date has been confirmed, she's working on the Max Bruch piece for viola, clarinet, and piano, as well as a quartet for clarinet, violin, viola, and cello by early 19th-century Finnish composer 18th-century Finish composer Crusell.

She'll also be playing at every clarinet masterclass still to come, which take place 1 pm Fridays in Lehmann Hall, and the final two symphony concerts, including under Alan Gilbert's baton in his final appearance at music director of the New York Philharmonic.

"It's a lot of work, but it's great," said Cantó, who unlike most of the Fellows isn't studying with any members of the faculty and didn't know anyone at the Academy before she arrived. "I came here this summer because I wanted to do as much as possible."

For Neil, Youth Will be Served

William Neil originally wrote his Concerto for Piccolo Clarinet in 1988

MUSIC ACADEMY Page 36 ▶



Composer William Neil modifies concerto for MAW for John Bruce Yeh, who is still the assistant principal clarinetist of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, to play with his Chicago Pro Music ensemble. Neil, who served as the first composer-in-residence with the Lyric Opera of Chicago and has had works performed all over the world, has also worked in finance to support his family. He has long self-published his compositions.

So, hearing that a young Spanish clarinetist who lives and studies in Finland was interested in a 30-year-old piece sparked his interest. That set in motion the re-working of his concerto for this summer at MAW.

Q. Why did you offer to write a reduction and then orchestrate the concert for Fatima?

A. The idea of a young musician discovering your work is a composer's dream. Like all the pieces I write, I have great hopes for my children. You know it's a good piece when it has a life of its own and someone finds it without you knocking on their door.

With Fatima, her passion was so addictive for a composer. And I was awed by her risk-taking. Many young soloists will be more conservative and just play the standard pieces that will most easily move them forward in their career. To follow through and help her out was thrilling for me.

What was the process to re-work it?

I only had 20 days to write the orchestration. I felt like I was her age again, a young composer with lots of ambition who could just make myself do it. So, I put everything aside and just got to work. I wanted it to be a unique version of the piece, not just a throw-off orchestration. It was pretty intense. But I loved the idea that I could, on a dime, meet a deadline and not compro-

mise my integrity. And having her be really happy about it made it all worthwhile. To have someone in the younger generation understand my language is amazing.

Does the piece still speak to you the way you wrote it? Or did you want to make changes to the clarinet part?

It's actually one of a handful of pieces I composed where I wouldn't change a note. It's sort of my Bach piece, because you really can't. That's what made it so challenging to orchestrate, because there are no other notes to add. All I could do was enhance the ambiance of the instruments that were originally involved.

Then she won the competition. How did that feel?

I got an email from her instructor, Richie Hawley, and all it said was "She won! She won!" I don't mind telling you that at that moment I broke down and cried. It's kind of also sparked my desire to compose more for clarinet.

I hear you are coming out here for the performance.

I had decided if she wins I want to be out there rooting her on, whatever the cost. Before I could even think about how to do that, (MAW artistic VP) Patrick Posey emailed and invited me to participate in the weekend as a guest composer, attend rehearsal on Saturday, and stay throughout. It plays out the whole relationship between composer, performer, and producer. It's a big thrill.

What's next for you?

I worked hard to keep my business going so I could continue to compose through the years. Now I'm planning to transition out of the financial work and go back to music full time. I feel like I just graduated from

college, when I had commissions and fellowships and residencies, all before reality hit in my late 30s. Now I'm going back to that and it's very exciting.

This Week at MAW

Friday, July 14: Early this evening, all in the Music Academy community are invited to attend for the grand opening of Hind Hall, the nearly 6,000-foot building designed for year-round use. Hind houses two large ensemble rehearsal rooms, plus six large faculty teaching studios, all of which will be available for use by the local music community during the non-summer months. Today they're being celebrated as representing the completion of the Music Academy's 17-year, \$50-million campus renovation plan that includes Hahn Hall, the Luria Education Center, the historic Marilyn Horne Main House, and the Lehrer Studio Building – plus an endowment that will maintain MAW as an All-Steinway piano facility in perpetuity. The party begins with a reception at 5 pm, followed by the world premiere of a short commemorative fanfare composed by Mosher guest artist Matthew Aucoin just for this event to usher in the ribbon cutting and remarks. "Hallelujah! The seemingly never-ending period of construction and remodeling at MAW is finally be-Hind-us! And what a sparkling jewel we now have on campus."

Monday, July 17: It was about a decade ago that several principal performers slated to star in the Music Academy's annual opera production came down with a severe and highly contagious virus. And while the understudies certainly acquitted themselves on opening night, the voice program took matters to heart and instituted deeper performance training for the secondary singers, including a full sing-through of the opera accompanied by the vocal pianists. Giuseppe Mentuccia, who is in charge of the chorus for the full production of Donizetti's *The Elixir of Love* later in the month, conducts today's covers concert of the charming romantic-comedy in the Italian bel canto tradition that finds a young man tricked by a salesman into purchasing bottles of wine that he believes are love potions, resulting in his adored Adina having to fess up to her love for him. The afternoon run-through features Fellows Kresley Figueroa singing Adina, Isabella Moore (Giannetta), John Chongyoon Noh (Nemorino), Andrew Dwan (Belcore), and Jeremy Hirsch (Dulcamara). Sung in Italian (3:30 pm; Hahn Hall; free.)

Tuesday, July 18: You've heard of Taco Tuesdays, where locals can chow down weekly on all-you-can-eat Mexican fare complete with all the fixins at either El Paseo or Casablanca, just a few blocks apart on State Street? Well, today at the Music Academy is offering Takács Tuesday, as the string quartet that formed 42 years ago (with two of the original members still performing) returns to town for a pair of public performances. The Hungarian string artists – who opened the season with a concert at Hahn Hall on the festival's first night – begin the day by running the chamber music masterclass this afternoon before heading over to the Lobero (perhaps following a stop for dinner at Taco Tuesday?) for the weekly Music Academy Faculty Artist series concert. Takács members violinists Edward Dusingberre and Károly Schranz, violist Geraldine Walthers, and cellist András Fejér will be joined by violinists Kathleen Winkler and Jorja Fellzanis, violist Richard O'Neill, and cellist David Gerber for Mendelssohn's Octet before the quartet sans Schranz is augmented by clarinetist Richie Hawley, bassoonist Benjamin Kamins, and horn player Julie Landsman for Beethoven's Septet (7:30 pm; Lobero; \$42).

Wednesday, July 19: It's hard to believe with 2½ weeks to go that we've already arrived at the final vocal masterclass of the summer, but the closing class at least offers the initial opportunity to see Speranza Scappucci in action. The Italian-born conductor, who recently made her Vienna debut with productions of *La Traviata* and *La Cenerentola* at the Vienna State Opera that were acclaimed by both the public and critics, serves the same role for MAW's offering of Donizetti's *The Elixir of Love* later in the month at our impressive concert hall known as the Granada (3:15 pm; Hahn; \$10).... Later today, it's another debut, as the Music Academy inaugurates its Sonata Faculty Recital. The impressive pairings feature violinist O'Neill and pianist Margaret McDonald playing Milhaud's *Quatre Visages*, trumpeter Paul Merkelo and pianist Natasha Kislenko performing Enescu's *Légende*, double bassist Nico Abondolo and pianist Jonathan Feldman (who chairs MAW's collaborative piano department) combining for Sofia Gubaidulina's Sonata, oboist Cynthia Koledo DeAlmeida and pianist Warren Jones playing Poulenc's piece, and visiting violinist Pamela Frank and pianist Jeremy Denk delivering Mozart's Sonata No. 25 in F Major. Sounds like a perfect 10 (7:30 pm; Hahn; \$35). *—JL*



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Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices California Properties is pleased to congratulate Kelly Mahan on the successful representation of the buyer at 2730 Glendessary Lane, which received multiple offers within the first several days on the market. Offered at \$1,395,000, Sold for \$1,280,000.



KELLY MAHAN
805.208.1451
Kelly@HomeInSantaBarbara.com

